769

SHAPES OF CLAY

JANUARY, 1927

GLADDING, McBEAN & CO.
LOS ANGELES PRESSED BRICK COMPANY

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
    In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
    What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

—John Keats: *Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

SHAPES OF CLAY

VOLUME III NUMBER 1

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Why Terra-Cotta?

By Aleck Curlett, of Curlett & Beelman, Architects

IN the construction of the new Pacific Finance Building at Los Angeles, the owners instructed their architects to design a building that embodied all the tried and proven features necessary to make the building the last word in office-building design, equipment, and appointment.

Further, it was their desire that the design of the exterior should be simple and dignified, and that, as to the materials selected for it, particular consideration should be given to their beauty, as well as durability and economy.

Certain features were incorporated that are not found in the average office building. For instance, the Pacific Finance Building has two basements which are used for garage purposes. Tenants may drive directly into the building and by means of the elevators reach their offices from the garage floors. Typical offices are laid out with the idea of flexibility for future subdivisions. One wing of the building is specially laid out for the use of doctors, surgeons, and dentists, with the installation of the most modern equipment.

For the exterior design of the building it was decided to use a modern adaptation of Italian Renaissance, as no form of architecture better expresses the character of this type of building, and, where a many-storied

building is necessary, no other form lends itself so readily to the practical demands of floor-space, fenestration, and the architectural demands of consistent proportion.

As to the material to be used for the exterior, careful study was made, as all street-fronts and returns were to be faced with it, and economy as well as beauty had to be considered. Terra-cotta was chosen, and in the investigation many advantages of this material were found over any other for exterior purposes.

Terra-cotta, when incorporated in an intelligently designed and soundly constructed building, is a material whose endurance has been attested by the countless ages of its use by mankind, even the most primitive of early examples exhibiting no tendency to decay with the lapse of time.

Terra-cotta has been found in a perfect state of preservation in the ruins of great works where it had been structurally used more than one thousand years before the beginning of the Christian Era. The history of civilization is written in its development. From crude brick forms, developing through various structural and esthetic requirements, we find it paralleling the building art of the ages, meeting the requirements for permanence, form, color, and beauty. Terra-cotta was freely used by Chaldean, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman builders. These ages of architectural terra-cotta produced examples in construction and decoration both original and exquisite. No wonder it was found to be a perfect medium for the rich form and decoration of the Renaissance of Italian architecture!

Before the days of steel construction exterior design was executed in stone or marble, and it is indicative of the adaptability of terra-cotta that a great many of the classic buildings now erected use terra-cotta exclusively or in part for the outside elevations.

Its upkeep is a negligible item in operating expense, while its fire-resistant properties are obvious from its nature as a burnt clay. Its impervious surface can be cleaned by a process of ordinary washing, and its possible range in color effects, which are thus permanently assured, exceeds the range in any other permanent material available for exterior uses.

Terra-cotta will retain its rich glow of warm sympathetic color as long

as the building stands, always reappearing, after any washing to remove atmospheric dust, in the original beauty of its kiln-fired coloring.

Aside from its qualities of permanence, plasticity, beauty, and economy of weight, there are several other reasons for the constantly increasing use of this material. Among these may be mentioned the perfection of facilities for making ashlar blocks much larger than was formerly possible, and this without sacrificing mechanical accuracy. An even more important development is the wide range—now almost unlimited—of color and texture in terra-cotta.

The natural result has been an enormous initial saving in the cost of materials where terra-cotta has been used, and a consequent improvement in the design of public buildings. The economy of terra-cotta depends largely upon frequent repetition, and in the design of the Pacific Finance Building the ornamental details of cornices, friezes, and ornaments all repeat many times.

Terra-cotta is the most durable building material known. It is unaffected by age or climatic change. Having been carried during the process of manufacture to a temperature exceeding 2000 degrees, it is untouched by the heat of conflagration. Salvage in the Baltimore, Buffalo, and San Francisco fires was not only very high and much greater than in any other exterior building material, but such damage as occurred was from mechanical cause and not from heat.

Terra-cotta is economical in structural weight. Its plasticity during manufacture makes it economically adjustable to any form of structure—concrete, steel, or brick—and it is very simply anchored and tied thereto. This has become most apparent in the skeleton steel structures of today. The light weight of terra-cotta allows a minimum of structural support, and consequently means cost-saving in frame and anchorage. Owing to perfect union in wall-bonding, the Los Angeles city building ordinance allows terra-cotta wall-facing to count as part of wall-thickness. A very important advantage of terra-cotta lies in the fact that ornament and modeling may be used freely, as, with the model once made, the material duplicates at practically no increase in cost over plain work.

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I · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Rising thirteen stories to the Los Angeles height limit, this distinguished structure is of Italian Renaissance design in a modern adaptation to American business and professional uses. It is clothed in a warm gray granitex terra-cotta from our Lincoln kilns.

II · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Conceiving the building in terms of simplicity and dignity, the architects were almost severely sparing in their use of ornament. They relied upon the texture and color attractiveness of terra-cotta to produce that effect of beauty which draws the eye of every beholder.

In texture and surface treatment there is no limit. The range extends from the natural clay finish, made impervious with a slip, through matt or dull to lustrous and brilliant glazes; and from the smooth or honed finish, through different degrees of tooling, dragging, and stippling, to any degree of roughness desired.

The field for the use of color or polychrome in terra-cotta, for exterior and interior, is very broad, and the palette most extensive in tone and texture. The glaze applied to the unburned body becomes not only a part of and inseparable from it, but it is absolutely permanent in tone.

The perfection of technique in body, form, modeling, texture, and color to which this material has been developed warrants us in assuming that we have reached a true answer to our question of "Why terra-cotta?"

Every variety of hue, from pale yellow to purple, passing through orange, red, and brown, is entirely at our command; nearly every kind of green and grey is also attainable; and with these, and pure white, what harmonies may we not achieve?

THE SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE
JOHN RUSKIN

SHAPES OF CLAY

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THE fact that four of the fine arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, and drawing—make their primary appeal to the eye is not without significance. What was true in the dim beginnings of these arts is true today—that the eye is the most competent witness in the appraisal of these forms of beauty. The fundamentals of human nature are "changeless and unchanging." If there is beauty in the eye of the modern beholder of ancient works of art, it can see no more than beholders of the same works in the day of Pericles.

Because that which appeals to the eye can best be represented directly, Gladding, McBean & Co. and Los Angeles Pressed Brick Company have installed on the roof of the building housing their Los Angeles offices a display in appropriate setting of garden pottery and furniture, terra-cotta and face brick, and decorative faience tile.

Here are shown, in a wide range of size and color, flower-pots, oil-jars, vases, flower-boxes, bird-baths, sun-dials, statuettes, fountains, benches, and tables. Whether the thought be to embellish the garden, the patio, the veranda, or the interior of a dwelling, something will be found in the curving grace of line and array of lovely colors that the eye will recognize as appropriate to the purpose. Thus the buyer need not rely upon the descriptive phrase, inadequate at best, or the reproductions of the catalogue.

There is one *right* piece of garden pottery or furniture for a particular site or angle of wall or path. For a garden is a stage, and by the strict canons of the art that governs its setting, it is no more excusable to put a vase or jar or statue in the wrong place than it would be to compose a stage setting with a fountain in the footlights. This analogy between garden and stage has been drawn with sure touch by Vernon Lee:

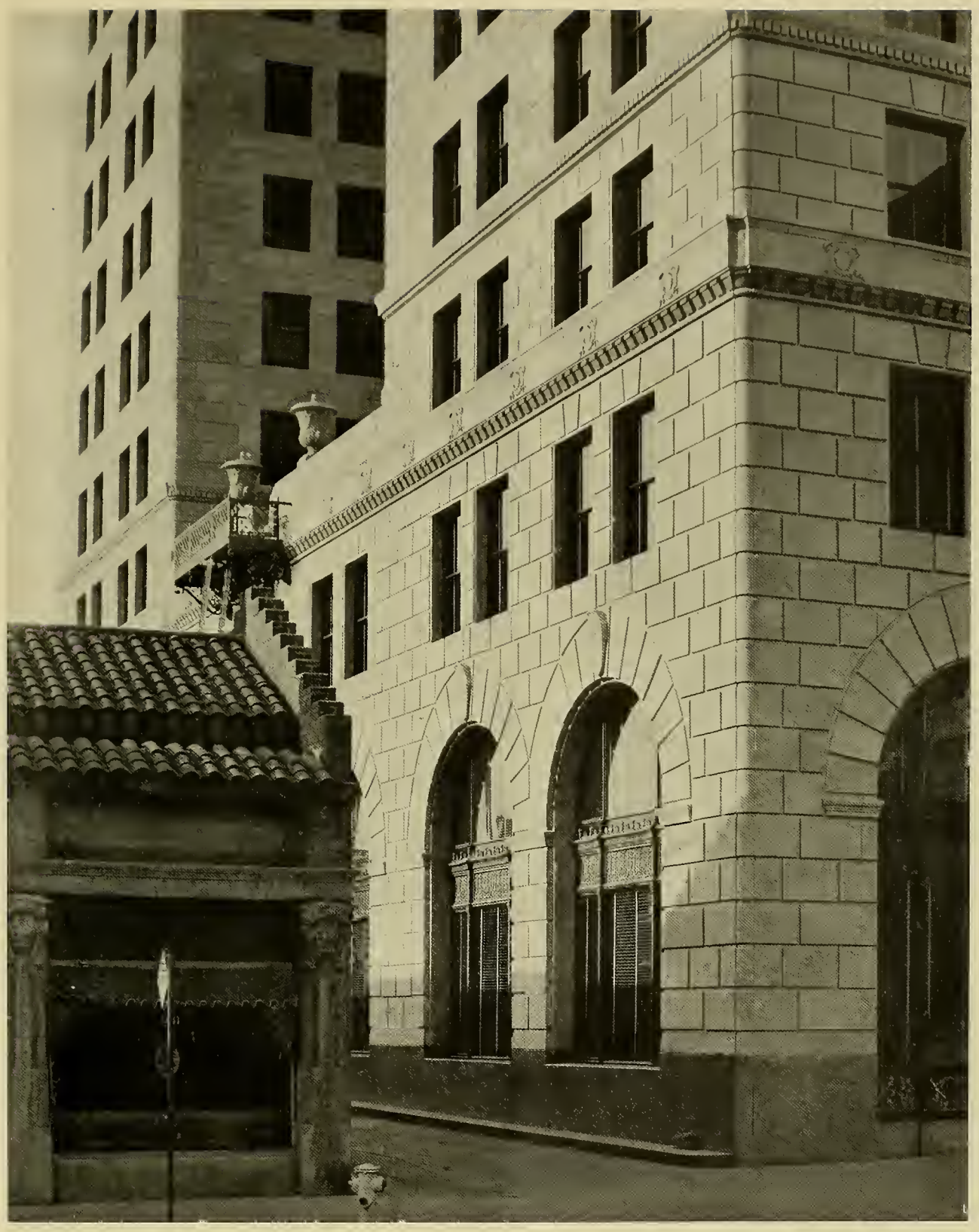
"For your new garden . . . brings in a new element—that of perspective, architecture, decoration; the trees used as building material, the lie of the land as theatre arrangements, the water as the most docile and multiform stage property."

California is a land where artistic instincts are translated generously into reality. Here landscape architects have not been slow to take advantage of the generous co-operation of nature and the impulse toward beauty that is stirring in the average citizen.

Of course, this display is for the public; all are welcome to inspect it.

III · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

The entranceway to the offices of the Pacific Finance Corporation takes its imposing character from chastity of design. This was accentuated by the boldly rusticated ashlar of the terra-cotta and the restrained use of terra-cotta ornament.



IV · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Viewed in detail, the lower stories satisfy the most exacting observer. One sees here a thoroughly American treatment that nevertheless sets the mind upon a delightful quest for analogies in the terra-cotta palace architecture of Florence during the Cinquecento.

V · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Examining the detail of the light-court at the thirteenth story, one is pleasantly affected by the exquisite unfolding of flower and leaf in a terra-cotta loveliness artfully contrasted with the simplicity elsewhere.
The roof tile on the penthouse is our varicolor Cordova.

VI · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Another detail of the topmost stories, where terra-cotta, having vindicated below its color and texture charms, here displays also its outstanding plasticity. In the distance, Barker Bros. Building, likewise clothed in Gladding, McBean & Co. materials.

VII · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Our southern offices are in this building, and the roof is the setting for an elaborate display of our garden pottery and Promenade tile—surely the most extensive all-the-year-round al fresco exhibition of the kind anywhere. Note the terra-cotta and Cordova tile of the loggia.

VIII · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Roofs of American office buildings are usually unsightly, drab places, with an unfinished look. But they need not be, as this and the succeeding views show. True, the object here was to display certain wares, but the utilitarian motive points the way to beauty.

IX · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

The atmosphere of a formal garden brought to the roof of a city sky-scraper. Only the lawn is missing. It is not difficult to imagine that these parapets, even though utilized to display piers of brick and terra-cotta, and panels of decorative tile, are veritable garden walls.

X · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

At the left an oil-jar of classic simplicity is in pleasing contrast with flower-pots and jars of more elaborate design. Not a piece of pottery here but would grace a garden or a room as well as it does this prosaic roof corner.

XI · Pacific Finance Building, Los Angeles — Curlett & Beelman, Architects

Reception-room of Gladding, McBean & Co. and Los Angeles Pressed Brick Company. The red Promenade tile is laid in Moresque pattern. The rich Persian vase at the right, and the oil-jars, as well as the terra-cotta table-legs, show the decorative possibilities of these objects indoors.

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Tropico Plant, Glendale, Los Angeles County, California

Los Angeles Plant, College and Date Streets, Los Angeles, California

Santa Monica Plant, Santa Monica, California

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Northern Clay Plant, Auburn, Washington

*

Terra-Cotta: *In enamel and unglazed finishes for the facing and trim of buildings*

Roof Tile: *Both machine and hand-made Latin Tiles in wide color variations*

Face Brick and Enameled Brick: *Brick for buildings and mantels*

Faience and Floor Tile: *Tile, glazed and unglazed, for floors, walls, bathrooms, terraces, and mantels*

Vitrified Salt Glazed Pipe: *For sewage, drainage, and irrigation: Conduit pipe, culvert pipe, drain tile, grease traps, flush tanks, segmental sewer blocks*

Hollow Clay Tile: *For partitions and bearing walls*

Fire-Clay Chimney Pipe: *Chimney tops, flue linings, gas flues*

Fire Brick and Fire Tile: *Fire clay, fire-brick dust*

Laundry Trays and Kitchen Sinks

Garden Pottery: *Vases, benches, urns, fountains, pedestals, sun dials, and bird baths*

Sounding a new note in the treatment
of a permanent exhibit for architects and their clients, this
part of our Los Angeles roof display shows the possibilities of decorative
faience tile. The terminal figures, or herms, are in brown
and black pulsichrome terra-cotta.

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GLADDING, MCBEAN & CO.

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